



**U.S. Department of Justice**  
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*Southern District of Georgia*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**July 14, 2006**

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**FORMER DODGE COUNTY HOSPITAL RESPIRATORY THERAPIST INDICTED**  
**IN CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT MEDICAID AND MEDICARE FRAUD**

Lisa Godbey Wood, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, announced today the return of a one-count indictment on July 13, 2006 by the federal grand jury sitting in Savannah against Michael L. Lawhorn of Eastman, Georgia. The Defendant is charged with a conspiracy to commit health care fraud and to make false statements relating to health care matters in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371.

The indictment arises out of a joint federal and state investigation into alleged fraudulent billings to the Medicare and Georgia Medicaid programs for oxygen treatments to patients in Dodge County and the surrounding area. The indictment alleges that from 1997 through 2002, while a respiratory therapist with Dodge County Hospital, Defendant Lawhorn conspired with representatives of a durable medical equipment company and others to use falsified blood test results and other documents in order to fraudulently bill Medicare and Georgia Medicaid for unnecessary oxygen treatments to patients. If convicted, the maximum statutory penalties include not more than five (5) years imprisonment; a fine of not more than \$250,000; and, not more than three (3) years of supervised release.

Ms. Wood stressed that an indictment is only an accusation and is not evidence of guilt. The Defendant is entitled to a fair trial, during which it will be the Government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Ms. Wood stated that the investigation which led to the indictment is on-going. The investigation has been conducted by agents with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General and the Georgia State Health Care Fraud Control Unit. The Government is represented by Jim Durham, Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia.

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